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SOME recent disastrous events can scarcely fail to re-awaken public attention to the importance of well constructed dwellings, to the evils of inefficient drainage, want of ventilation, and crowded graveyards in the midst of towns, and otherwise to quicken the sanitary movement, which had begun to lag. When the Registrar-General makes a report that while the annual deaths in the town districts of Manchester, for example, are 37 to 1,000 males living, in the extra-metropolitan parts of Surrey they are but 19,—in other words, that though the population of Surrey exceeded that of Manchester, yet in seven years 16,000 persons died in the latter place over and above the deaths in Surrey, and that these fell a sacrifice to known causes,—"Here in the most advanced nation in Europe—in one of the largest towns of England—in the midst of a population unmatched for its energy, industry, manufacturing skill—in Manchester, the centre of a victorious agitation for commercial freedom—aspiring to literary culture—where Percival wrote and Dalton lived,"—the public mind is roused to the necessity of proper measures, and for a time the subject appears to make good progress. Speedily, however, the fact is forgotten; and the enemy being hidden, they fall back into the more comfortable belief that they have been frightened at shadows, and that none exist.

Recent events, however, as we have said,—the circumstances under which the more serious outbreaks of cholera amongst us have occurred, a consideration of the localities wherein it is and is not found, will speak trumpet-tongued, and will materially aid in hastening the admission as axioms of those truths at which individuals long since arrived by painful and lengthened investigations, but which have been until recently wholly disregarded by the multitude. And these once universally admitted, the succeeding steps are easier.

When we find the first cases occurring near the mouth of a sewer; when we hear a jury summoned to inquire into the cause of death in the case of those persons who died recently in Rosemary-lane, Whitechapel, bringing in as their verdict—"That the deceased persons died natural (?) deaths from Asiatic cholera, caused by the fœtid and abominable condition of the habitations situate in the courts and alleys in which they resided;" that at the Establishment for Pauper Children at Tooting, where there has been such a fearful loss of life, stagnant ditches, filled with decomposing vegetable and animal matter, abound, and that in a prison where the disease has begun to rage violently, those who are able to judge ascribe it in great part to defective ventilation,—the necessity of steps to remove these causes of loss, suffering, and deprivation, becomes obvious to all.

What has been already gradually achieved by improvements made without the full appreciation of their paramount worth, should further encourage to persevering efforts. The term of human life has been lengthened over the whole kingdom,—unnecessarily shortened, fearfully sacrificed, as it still is. "The year 1685," says Mr. Macaulay, in his philosophical and admirable history of England (the perusal of which has afforded us more enjoyment than we can well express), "was not accounted sickly; yet in the year 1685 more than one in 23 of the inhabitants of the capital died. At present only one inhabitant of the capital in 40 dies annually. The difference in salubrity between the London of the nineteenth century, and the London of the seventeenth century, is very far greater than the difference between London in an ordinary season, and London in the cholera."* And yet how much does it still need improvement; how greatly might life still be lengthened; how obvious, in many cases, are the means which offer themselves! Let us all strive to aid in the great work.

The superintending inspectors appointed by the Board of Health have been actively engaged in taking evidence in various towns, and the reports in some cases are, we believe, nearly ready. From these we shall be able to judge of the advantages which are likely to follow the inquiry. From Gloucester, amongst others, where numerous defilements exist, we have received intimation that the inspector, Mr. Cresy's, inquiry has been very elaborate and careful, which, knowing what we do of Mr. Cresy, is nothing more than we anticipated. Letters from another town, as to temper and prejudice exhibited by the inspector sent down there, are less satisfactory; we forbear, however, from any definite statements on the subject just now. It is stated that nearly one hundred towns and places have petitioned the Board to send down an officer to make public inquiry, with a view to the application of the Health Act: and, in consequence, the Board have appointed two additional inspectors, namely, Mr. T. W. Rammell, and Mr. W. Lee, of the firm of Flockton, Lee, and Flockton, of Sheffield, of which town he was surveyor of highways.

At Chelmsford, where the inquiry has just commenced, the inhabitants are entering warmly into it,—anxiously affording all the assistance in their power. We are glad to find foremost in the official announcement of the subjects to be inquired into, "The State of the Burial Grounds," and sincerely hope that no pains will be spared to obtain accurate information on this head. That the burial grounds are most fruitful sources of disease, there can be no doubt on the minds of unprejudiced men who have inquired into the matter.

In the course of the investigation under the Act, which is now going on in Worcester, Mr. Orwin, a surgeon, brought the matter very prominently forward, giving a startling picture of the condition of the graveyards in that city. We extract two or three paragraphs from his evidence:—

"St. Martin's.—The present sexton has lived in a house adjoining the churchyard about six years. When he first resided there, he frequently experienced a very unpleasant smell, which affected his health very much, but he has now become more accustomed to it, and does not find the evil so serious. This ground is so full that they cannot tell where to make a grave without first boring the ground. The sexton has known the gravedigger take up a coffin, in mistake, containing a corpse in a state of putrefaction, which he has been obliged to put into the ground again and close the grave, and make one elsewhere.

Saint Nicholas.—This churchyard has been closed for some time, owing to its being so overcrowded with the dead. There is a crypt beneath this church, in which corpses are buried in wooden coffins. The exhalations, which issue through the apertures on each side of the crypt, have caused great annoyance to the rector, who lives close to the church.

St. Helen's.—This churchyard is so full that it has been closed. A respectable inhabitant, who lives near, has been frequently very much annoyed by the offensive stench. Interments have taken place in the church in wooden coffins; and the sexton informed me that, when a vault has been opened, he has known the smell to be almost intolerable, and has been obliged to throw the church windows open, and leave them so for some time.

All Saint's.—This churchyard is very full, although interments still take place there. A very great annoyance used to be experienced by some of the inmates of the houses adjoining the churchyard, which have been recently pulled down. These houses were partly below the level of the yard, and in close contact with the soil. It was stated to me by some of the occupants that the putrid matters actually oozed through the wall, rendering it damp and discoloured, and causing a most offensive smell. The health of all the members of the family was more or less affected.

St. Andrew's.—Coffins are frequently exposed in digging graves. Many coffins have been placed in this ground with not more than 17 inches of earth above them.

St. Alban's.—The smell arising from interments here is frequently of a very obnoxious kind. There is also a plot of burial-ground banked up against the back of the church, and enclosed from a populous street by a high wall, through which the rain may percolate and carry impurities from decomposed bodies into the street on the one hand, and underneath the church on the other."

Some extraordinary facts, proving the death-dealing power of the gases given off by decomposing bodies on opening the ground, even long after interment, and where no *smell* was perceptible, will presently be made public. It is a mistake to suppose that when there is no smell there is no danger. On this point Mr. G. A. Walker says, in a recent letter to the *Times*,—"Though the nose is not merely an ornamental appendage to the face, but the registrar of odours; and though the "sentinel" may be constantly on guard, he cannot persist in the recognition of even the most disgusting effluvia beyond a certain period of time. Yet what does this prove? Why, that by the sense of smell we recognise the presence or absence of an odorous compound—that is all. Let not people, therefore, deceive themselves, or deceive others. Life has, in myriads of instances, been destroyed without any smell being perceptible. If it were not so, how comes it that the fathers and mothers of the generations that are past, have never smelt the miasms that impaired the health or destroyed the lives of their offspring by the various diseases to which childhood is more especially liable—as measles, scarletina, &c., &c.? Or why was it that, about this time last year, when the mortality in London alone exceeded by thousands the ordinary two-weeks' average—why was it, I say, that no man smelt anything peculiar; whilst this year, when cholera (an exaggerated form of typhus) is the destroying angel, have the victims seen, or have they recognised by the nose, the peculiar principles that have poisoned their blood, and 'knawed' them out of their lives?".

In this same letter, speaking of Clement's-lane, Strand, and its graveyard, he says,—"That in this lane, in which the living breathe on all sides an atmosphere impregnated with the odour of the dead, the proportion of

* The following quotation from the same work will be found not impertinent. "Of the blessings which civilization and philosophy bring with them, a large proportion is common to all ranks, and would, if withdrawn, be missed as painfully by the labourer as by the peer. The market place which the rustic can now reach with his cart in an hour was a hundred and sixty years ago a day's journey from him. The street which now affords to the artisan, during the whole night, a secure, convenient, and a brilliantly lighted walk, was, a hundred and sixty years ago, so dark after sunset that he would not have been able to see his hand, so ill-paved that he would have run constant risk of breaking his neck, and so ill-watched that he would have been in imminent danger of being knocked down and plundered of his small earnings. Every bricklayer who falls from a scaffold, every sweeper of a crossing who is run over by a carriage, may now have his wounds dressed and his limbs set with a skill such as, a hundred and sixty years ago, all the wealth of a great lord like Ormond, or of a merchant prince like Clayton, could not have purchased. Some frightful diseases have been extirpated by science, and some have been banished by police."

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